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Our Priority.

UPCOMING ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA

Mr. OBAMA. Mr. President, I rise today to discuss the situation concerning the upcoming elections in Nigeria.

The people of Nigeria have a historic achievement within their grasp: their country's first peaceful, democratic transfer of power from one elected civilian government to another. To secure this victory for themselves and for Africa, and to retain the kind of international confidence in Nigeria's future that is essential for the country's growth, Nigerians need and deserve the strongest possible international support for free, fair, and peaceful elections on April 14 and 21.

Successful elections are not guaranteed. Political violence and serious irregularities have tarnished past polling in parts of the country, denying some Nigerians their democratic rights. No one truly interested in Nigeria's long-term stability and prosperity can accept repeats of these incidents as regular features of the country's political landscape.

There is already cause for concern this time around. Regrettably, preparations for this month's elections have been sluggish, and the independence of the electoral commission has been compromised. Important national discussions about corruption and accountability have been temporarily hijacked by elaborate preelection maneuvering.

But the Nigerian people can still succeed in exercising their democratic rights and taking control of their national destiny. The rule of law, not the wishes of the powerful, can resolve outstanding questions about the electoral process. American interests in working with a strong and democratic Nigerian partner will remain powerful regardless of who is victorious when the returns come in, which is precisely why we should use our voice now, not to favor any party or candidate, but to support Nigeria's democracy.

FIFTY CALIBER SNIPER RIFLES

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, militaries around the world use .50 caliber sniper rifles which are noted for their powerful and destructive capabilities. In the hands of a terrorist, these weapons could inflict devastating results. The fact that terrorists can legally obtain weapons in the United States with such destructive capabilities puts us all at great risk.

In 1985, a previously classified National War College strategic study report, written by a former Deputy Assistant Director of the U.S. Secret Service, warned of the growing threat from large caliber sniper rifles, specifically .50 caliber rifles. These "long range weapons pose a significant threat for U.S. National Command Authority figures if used by terrorists or other assailants," the Secret Service warned. "These weapons are more accurate than shoulder fired antitank rockets and, if used against aircraft, [are] immune to electronic counter measures."

Ten years later the RAND Corporation, a nonprofit global policy think tank, issued a report identifying .50 caliber sniper rifles as a serious threat to the security of U.S. Air Force bases. After noting the success of Barrett sniper rifles against light armored vehicles in the 1991 gulf war, the report noted, "Such weapons also give light forces a portable and quite deadly option against parked aircraft. These rifles are effective against man-sized targets up to 1,600 meters away and could hit aircraft sized targets at even greater ranges." It further states that, "it seems only a matter of time before these or similar weapons find their way into the arsenals of potential adversaries, if they have not already done so."

The August 2003 U.S. Army Intelligence training handbook, "A Military Guide to Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century," specifically identified large caliber sniper rifles as an attractive weapon for terrorists to use for an assassination. It noted that .50 caliber sniper rifles are of particular interest because they can engage attacks on "targets that are difficult to get close enough for other weapons," yet "can also effectively engage light armored vehicles."

A 2004 report on security at Los Angeles International Airport, LAX, specifically warned of snipers using .50 caliber rifles to fire at parked or taxiing aircraft among a list of potential terrorist attack tactics. The RAND Corporation compiled this list by considering information gathered by intelligence organizations based on the historical tendencies and capabilities of terrorist organizations. The analysis however was not able to identify "any truly satisfactory" security improvement options to protect against such sniper attacks.

In November 2004, the Homeland Security Center at the University of Southern California, funded by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, identified .50 caliber sniper rifles as an imminent threat to civil aviation. A risk analysis prepared by the center stated that the range and power of .50 caliber sniper rifles enable them to "target fuel tanks, passengers, pilots, and down aircraft in the worst case." It also noted that al Qaida has acquired and used these rifles against coalition forces in Iraq.

These destructive weapons are currently subject to only minimal Federal

regulation. Buyers need to only be 18 years old, rather than the 21 years of age which is required for handgun purchases. There is no minimum age requirement for the possession of a .50 caliber weapon and no regulation on second hand sales. Congress must do more to help keep military style firearms out of the hands of terrorists.

HONORING OF DREW BLEDSOE

Mr. KERRY. Mr. President, today I wish to honor former New England Patriots Quarterback Drew Bledsoe on his retirement, after 14 years in the National Football League, NFL.

Drew Bledsoe helped usher in the modern era of Patriots football. Throughout his career, Drew Bledsoe may have also played for the Buffalo Bills, an AFC East rival of the Patriots, and for the Dallas Cowboys, but he got his start in chilly Foxboro, MA.

Fourteen years ago, a young Bledsoe was the first overall selection in the NFL Draft for New England draft of Washington State. He brought the Patriots to their first Super Bowl in 11 years, and despite ultimately losing to Brett Favre and the Green Bay Packers, a newfound feeling of excitement and pride overtook New England's football fans. And that feeling hasn't subsided.

After Tom Brady went down in the AFC playoff in 2002, Bledsoe led the Patriots to victory over the Pittsburgh Steelers, ensuring the Pats a spot in Super Bowl XXXVI. And as you know, that was just the beginning of the New England football dynasty.

Bledsoe is a four-time Pro-Bowl quarterback, who throughout his career threw for more than 44,000 yards and completed more than 250 touchdown passes. He finished his career 7th all-time in yards passing, 13th in touchdowns, and 5th in completions.

His career off the field was just as impressive. Bledsoe has long worked to help improve the lives of children by teaching parenting skills through both the Drew Bledsoe Foundation and Parenting with Dignity. The programs' curriculum, which teaches the importance of family values, is used nationwide, reaching an estimated 1.75 million American families. He has also served as international chairman of the Children's Miracle Network, helping to raise millions of dollars to benefit children nationwide.

Bledsoe is the recipient of the Thurman Munson Humanitarian Award, the NFL Alumni Spirit Award for exemplifying the spirit of the NFL caring for kids and the Walter Payton Man of the Year Award, chosen by his teammates for demonstrating balance between civic and professional responsibilities. He also received the Ed Block Courage award, chosen by his teammates as the NFL player demonstrating the most courage and character.

Drew Bledsoe has conducted himself with both dignity and maturity